

A Historical Note

The basis of many of our roads today in Lake County had their beginnings back in the 1830s. The first wave of settlers primarily from New York and the New England States began following the ratification of the Treaty of Chicago between the United States and the United Nations of Chippewa, Ottawa and Potawatomi Indians on February 23, 1835. At this early date, only one public road existed in Lake County. This was the Green Bay Military Road established in 1832.

The establishment of new roads very quickly became a priority issue with the settlers. Laws were in place even at this early date which laid out procedures for establishing a road. The first step was to petition the County Commissioners Court, today called the County Board. The road petition had to be signed by at least 35 voters residing within five miles of the proposed road. At this time, voters were only men over the age of 21.

The three County Commissioners would either accept or deny the petition (most were accepted) at a regularly scheduled meeting. At the time of acceptance, the Commissioners would appoint three viewers whose responsibility was to conduct a field survey and prepare a written report to be presented at the next meeting. This road report could be approved, denied or given an extension of time. If approved, the road was established at a width of four rods (66 feet). In a few cases, the Court denied the road report based on their opinion that it was not in the best public interest or caused damage to the lands of property owners such as running through an orchard.

Since no highway department existed, the County Commissioners set a labor tax which required all able bodied men between the ages of 21 and 50 years to work two days during the calendar year to construct and maintain the roads. If an individual could not or would not perform the work, he was required to pay the County \$1.00 for each day of service missed. By 1842, the labor tax was increased to five days of service for the calendar year.

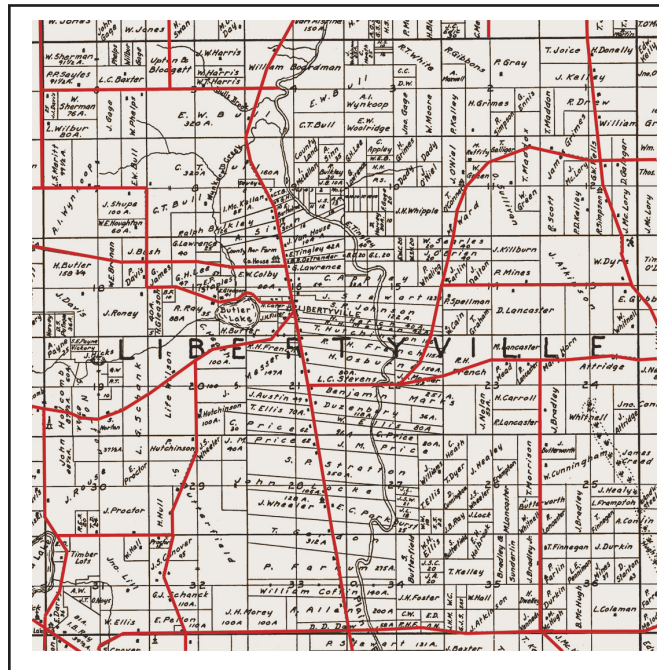
In addition, a road tax was levied at a rate of 10 cents on every \$100 of property liable to be assessed. Since land was still in the public domain and not available for purchase from the General Land Office until September 10, 1840 (in western Lake County) and June 14, 1842 (in eastern Lake County), land was not subject to taxation. As a result, the County Commissioners used personal property for tax purposes. The personal property subject to taxation was listed as "stud horses, axes, jimmies, mules, horses, mares, carriages, wagons, carts, money actually loaned, stock in trade, stock in incorporated companies, sheep, hogs, guns and rifles."

To oversee that the maintenance of the roads was being done, the County Commissioners Court in 1839 created 24 road districts within Lake County. One resident of each road district was appointed to act as Road

Supervisor. The term of office was for one year. The use of county road districts was abandoned in 1850 when the Township form of government was adopted.

Portions of these old roads approved in the 1830s still exist today. A few of the better known roads are Illinois Route 21 (Milwaukee Avenue) from Cook County to the Village of Gurnee is the old Chicago and Milwaukee Road. Portions of Illinois Route 59 follow the old Dundee and Bristol (Antioch) Road. Segments of Illinois Routes 45 and 60 follow an old Indian Trail and the Half Day and Nippersink Point Road. Illinois Route 43 follows parts of the former Corduroy Road. Illinois Route 83 in the north half of the County follows the old Fox River Road. Illinois Route 45 in the north half of the County follows portions of the old West Milwaukee Road.

- contributed by Al Westerman



The Libertyville township portion of an 1861 map of Lake County. Roads are highlighted in red.